



Notes from Underground

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Study Guide



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Summary

Part II, Chapter X

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Summary

As the final chapter opens, the Underground Man is running frantically around his room and looking at Liza through a crack between the screens in the wall. Liza realizes that the Underground Man's desire for her does not come from love, but from a desire to humiliate and dominate her. She realizes that he hates her and envies her.

The Underground Man explains why he is incapable of love. He says that, for him, love consists only of the right to tyrannize someone else. He cannot understand unselfish love, and he has failed to understand that Liza has come to see him because of love rather than because of his elaborate, "pathetic" speeches. At this point, though, the Underground Man only wants "peace"—the pressure of "living life" and interacting with others is becoming too much for him.

Liza gets up to leave. The Underground Man forces some money into her hand in a last, malicious attempt to humiliate her. He claims in his narration that the urge to humiliate her did not come from his heart; he did it only because it seemed appropriately literary, and after he did it he was ashamed.

The Underground Man calls after Liza immediately after she leaves, but she does not respond. He hears the door slam as she leaves the building. A minute later, he finds the money he gave her crumpled on the table, realizing that she threw it away before she left the apartment. The Underground Man is shocked that Liza could be capable of such a noble action. He runs after her into the falling snow, but she is gone. The Underground Man is distraught and wants to beg her

forgiveness. He declares that he will never remember this moment with indifference. A moment later, though, he convinces himself that Liza will be purified and elevated by the hatred and forgiveness that his insult will inspire in her. At the same time, he is conscious of the literary merit of his own thoughts, and feels ashamed that he is focusing on that literary merit rather than on Liza's welfare.

Back in the present, the flashback finished, the Underground Man decides that "all this comes out somehow none too well in my recollection." He decides that perhaps he will end his notes at this point. He wonders if he should have written them at all, for they are not "literature, but corrective punishment." His antisocial life in the underground is "not interesting," especially since he is not a hero, but rather an antihero whose dread of "living life" is all too familiar to the reader. The Underground Man accuses his readers of having all of the problems that he has, but refusing to carry them through to their logical conclusion. Perhaps, he suggests, he is more "living" than his more active readers.

Suggesting that modern men, ashamed of the fleshly reality of their lives, retreat more and more into abstract ideas, the Underground Man decides not to write any more notes. A note Dostoevsky writes at the end tells us that the Underground Man could not keep this resolution to stop writing, and instead continued to write compulsively. Dostoevsky writes that this point in the notes seems like a good place to stop, however, so the novel ends here.

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The Underground Man: Character Analysis

CHARACTERS



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